LOOKING BACK AT MR. BELLAMY

By ARTHUR CHAPMAN

Illustration by RALPH BARTON

IT IS a dangerous thing to be a novelist-prophet.

It isn't dangerous like crossing a street in defiance of traffic signals. Nor is it dangerous like changing seats in a rowboat, or any of the other familiar methods of showing one's total disregard of destiny as an institution, but it is dangerous, just the same.

For instance, consider the case of Edward Bellamy, who tried his hand, as far back as 1887, at prophesying what the world many years in the future was going to be like as a place in which to live—and fumbled nine chances out of ten.

Mr. Bellamy was born in 1850 and died in 1898. His work of prophecy was called "Looking Backward," because the hero looked backward upon the civilization of the '80s from the viewpoint of the year 2000 A. D. and found little of which he could be proud.

Mr. Bellamy let his imagination take wings in "Looking Backward." His book, being the first of the prophetic type, created much comment. People read it everywhere—on the horsecars and on the horsehair furniture, for that was the era of the horse in transportation and home furnishing. Most people liked the book, probably because it pictured a Utopia which they liked to believe was coming.

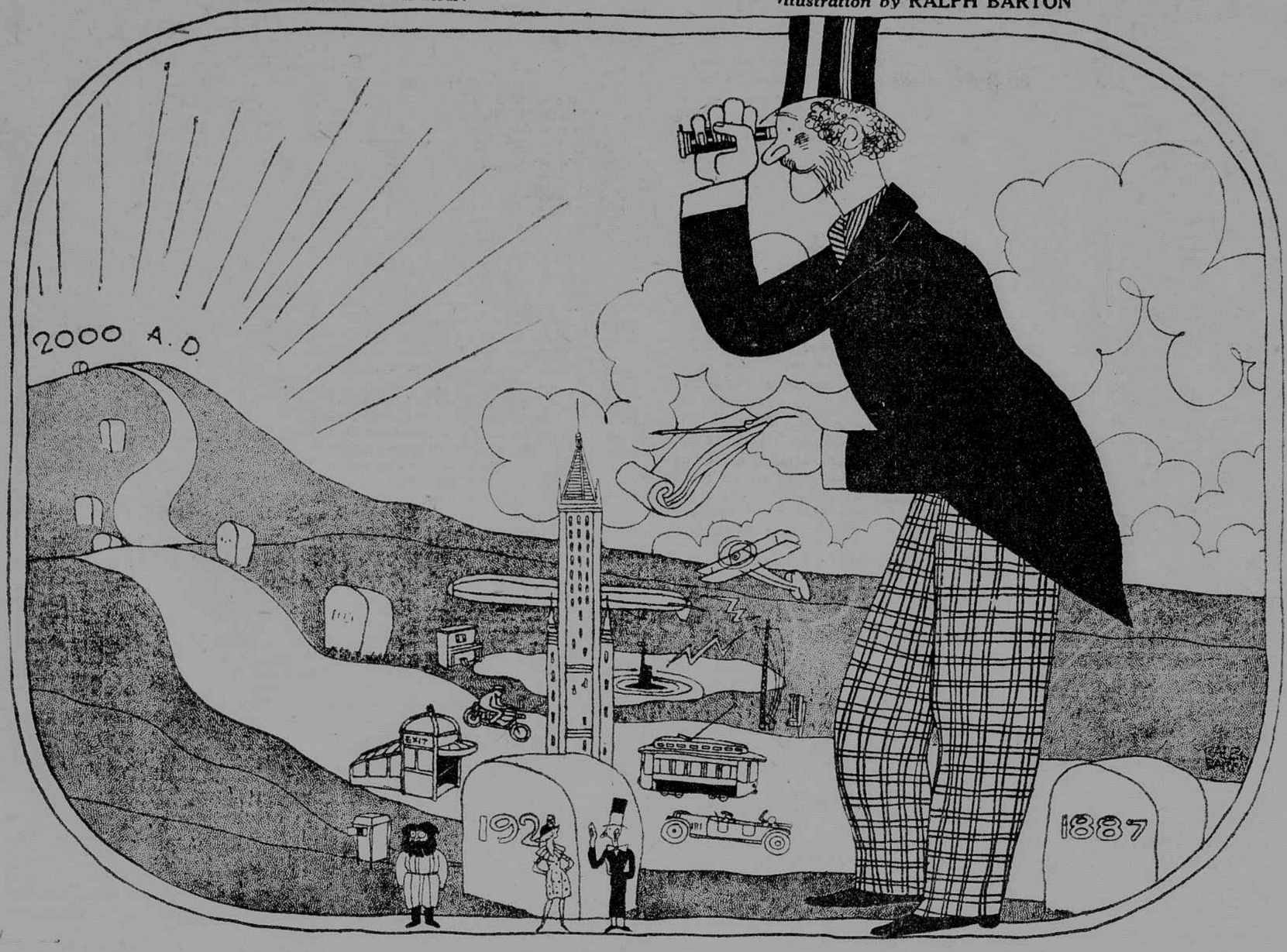
It didn't arrive, though of course it may put in appearance some time during the three-score-and-odd years to come. In fact, not over three or four years ago people pretty generally had fallen into the belief that the human family had put itself about as far away from the millennium as it was possible to get. So, if Bellamy's Utopia finally does arrive it will have the added distinction of having started from scratch.

"Looking Backward" concerned a young Bostonian who could not sleep well nights, and who had a subterranean chamber built in the basement of his suburban home. Therein might have been discerned a weakness in the book at the start, for what could be more quiet than suburban Boston in the days before the electric car and the automobile? In fact, what is more quiet now? But even the slightest noises must have disturbed the hero of "Looking Backward," for he went ahead with the construction of his subterranean chamber and then engaged the services of a hypnotist to put him to sleep every night. With all those precautions it was no wonder that the sleep proposition was overdone somewhat and the hero did not wake up until the alarm clocks were sounding the year 2000. In fact, it wouldn't have been at all surprising if he had slept a thousand years longer.

When he woke up the hero found himself in the clutches of a long-winded gentleman named Dr. Leete—one of those individuals who know how and why everything is run and like nothing better than to talk about it. The doctor tells about the superiorities of the civilization to which the hero has awakened, and as soon as he begins to talk the book begins to fall down in the matter of prophecy. Here are some of the things Dr. Leete, in his descriptions of life in the year 2000, left out of the reckoning altogether:

Airplanes, wireless, dirigibles, automobiles, submarines, trolley cars, phonographs, subways, scraps of paper, slot machines, Bolshevists, prohibition, poison gas, motorcycles, flappers, motion pictures, player-pianos, skyscrapers, dreadnoughts, card indexes.

The list might be extended indefinitely, but enough has been included to show the dangers of prophesying what a more or less eccentric civilization is going to do. Not that anybody else could have done the job better than Bellamy. As a matter of fact, he hit some things surprisingly well. He seems to have had an inkling of the radio concert in his idea of music of the twenty-first century period. The heroine escorts the slumber champion to the conservatory, where she presses a button and turns a thumbscrew or so, and immediately the room is "flooded with organ music." It seems that concerts are set for a certain hour. All great artists are in the employ of the government, and they sing at these great public functions, sometimes having an audience of 150,000.



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Only these concerts are transmitted over wires. Radio concerts, such as those given today by wireless, do not figure in the prophecies. Mr. Marconi saw something that a mere novelist could hardly be expected to see.

Getting things by pressing the button was a common performance in the Bellamy Utopia. All the shopping was done that way. The heroine went to a big store, but there were no clerks in sight. She made her choice—evidently being one of those rare shoppers who know just what they want before they start out—and pressed a button. Immediately a clerk appeared and wrote down her order. But the goods were not wrapped and delivered, as the store with the button-pressing arrangements was only the sample place, after all. The goods were shipped from a great central warehouse.

In Utopia as Bellamy saw it there was no housework. There were public restaurants and community eating houses. "We have no use for domestic servants," avers Dr. Leete, who doesn't go so far as to quote the 1921 schedule of maid-of-all-work wages, just to show to what lengths the problem went before the millennium arrived.

One thing that will be rather worth sticking around this globe until the year 2000 for is the Looking Backward system of coping with rainy weather. No umbrellas are carried. Light coverings are let down over all sidewalks—presumably the weather man having things in hand so there are no forty-mile gales to rip such things to pieces.

Authorship, according to the Bellamy view, will be a rather hard game. Every author will have to defray the first cost of publication. If his books prove successful, after several seasons, he will be permitted to have some royalties. Trotzky and Lenine have not thought up any more thorough way of discouraging the habit of tampering with type.

Newspaper editors, according to Mr. Bellamy, will be subject to the recall, if their readers do not like them. But so far the reader is simply "stopping his paper." Mr. Bellamy forecasted no congress, no legislatures, and no politicians, because no formal government in his Utopia would be necessary. Also there would be no army and navy—perhaps a prophetic foreshadowing of the effect of the conference soon to be held at Washington. The pictured abolition of revenue service, with its assessors and collectors, would almost inspire many a protesting taxpayer of this day to hunt up a subterranean sleeping chamber and a hypnotist that he, too, might sleep until the year 2000.

Doctors in the era pictured by Mr. Bellamy have to render reports of their work to a medical bureau. If the individual proves his worth, he is advanced. Athletes go back to contending for the bays, evidently, as Dr. Leete says: "With professional sports, which were such a curious feature of your day, we have nothing to do, nor are the prizes for which our athletes contend money prizes, as with you." Yet the professional sportsmen are dividing larger gate receipts every year. A vision of Boyle's Thirty Acres at the time of the Dempsey-Carpentier fight, or a statement of the proceeds of the recent world series in New York would have been discouraging to Mr. Bellamy. Even the earnings of some of the professional golf stars—there was not a golf corner in a sport page in 1887—would buy enough wreaths to keep the brows of Utopian athletes uncomfortable for years.

Having no legislature "because there is nothing to make laws about," naturally the legal profession cut a sorry figure in Dr. Leete's picture of the dawn of the twenty-first century. But the law schools haven't done anything but enlarge from year to year since "Looking Backward" was written, and as for correspondence schools in law one can't go looking backward in the subsequent pages of any magazine without running across advertisements calling attention to opportunities for making a short cut to the bar.

In the matter of fashions the author seems to hit things off a trifle better. Dr. Leete does not tell just what the year 2000 styles are, but he intimates that they are not to be compared with those of 1887, when "head covering was a dizzy structure almost a foot tall, and dresses had the almost incredible extension of the skirt behind by means of artificial contrivances." Dating things from the era of the bustle, of course, no prophet could go wrong in saying that women's dress in the future was going to be something better.

Surplus wealth, according to this prophet of the '80s, was to be spent on city improvement. The nation was to become the only "capitalist," in place of all other capitalists. Labor problems were to vanish "as a result of a process of evolution." The author scored an Oslerian beat by picking the age of forty-five as the time of retirement of the individual from business. Industrial service was to start not earlier than twenty-one. What the young people were to do with their spare time, with no movies to which they could go, is not set forth.

The question of getting common labor done was to be solved by having it the first step in the individual's progress in industry. Industrial service was to be compulsory for three years. After this draft term in the manual labor army the individual had the right to choose anything he might elect to do along the line of professional work. No doubt the boss of a big engineering project of to-day would look askance at an army of "helpers" recruited from those who were serving three year terms at manual labor preparatory to opening studios or offices.

It seems that in case of refusal to serve the three years at manual labor in the Bellamy Utopia, individuals were punished by "being cut off from all human society." Such punishment would not be terrifying to the several hundred thousand who managed to dodge the war draft successfully. Probably such individuals would take a long chance in the matter of dodging the three-year labor draft, if nothing more than a huge social snub impended.

The crop of novels of prophecy has not been as large as one might expect, considering the financial success of Mr. Bellamy's effort. In fact, as the inventors and discoverers began to get busy, their actual achievements quite outdistanced anything that writers might prophesy. Sitting down and telling what the world was going to be like in a thousand years, or even in one year, became such a patent waste of time that novelists simply did not attempt it.

So the Bellamy excursion in prophecy heads a very small department of literature and might even be alluded to as an example of what should be avoided in case one is thinking coldbloodedly and deliberately of attempting a literary career.

MISS LULU BETT

By ZONA GALE

CHAPTER X.

STILL in that twisted position, Lulu looked up at her. Her straying hair, her parted lips, her lifted eyes were singularly pathetic.

"My poor, poor sister!" Ina said. She stuck together her little plump hands. "Oh, Dwight!—when I think of it! What have I done—what have we done that I should have a good, kind, loving husband—be so protected, so loved, when other women . . . Darling!" she sobbed, and drew near to Lulu. "You know how sorry I am—we all are." . . .

Lulu stood up. The white shawl slipped to the floor. Her hands were stiffly joined.

"Then," she said, "give me the only thing I've got—that's my pride. My pride—that he didn't want to get rid of me."

They stared at her. "What about my pride?" Dwight called to her, as across great distances. "Do you think I want everybody to know my brother did a thing like that?"

"You can't help that," said Lulu.

"But I want you to help it. I want you to promise me that you won't shame us like this before all our friends."

"You want me to promise what?"

"I want you—I ask you," Dwight said with an effort, "to promise me that you will keep this, with us—a family secret."

"No!" Lulu cried. "No, I won't do it! I won't do it! I won't do it!"

It was like some crude chant, knowing only two tones. She threw out her hands, her wrists long and dark on her blue skirt.

"Can't you understand anything?" she asked. "I've lived here all my life—on your money. I've not been strong enough to work, they say—well, but I've been strong enough to be a hired girl in your house—and I've been glad to pay for my keep. . . . But there wasn't anything about it I liked. . . . Well, then I got a little something, same as other folks. I thought I was married, and I went off on the train and he bought me things and I saw the different towns. And then it was all a mistake. I didn't have any of it. I came back here and went into your kitchen again—I don't know why I came back. I s'pose because I'm most thirty-four and new things ain't so easy any more—but what have I got or what'll I ever have? And now you want to put on to me having folks look at me and think he run off and left me, and having 'em all wonder. . . . I can't stand it. I can't stand it. I can't." . . .

"You'd rather they'd know he fooled you, when he had another wife?" Dwight sneered.

"Yes! Because he wanted me. How do I know—maybe he wanted me only, just because he was lonesome the way I was. I don't care why! And I won't have folks think he went and left me."

"That," said Dwight, "is a wicked vanity."

"That's the truth. Well, why can't they know the truth?"

"And bring disgrace on us all!"

"It's me—it's me"—Lulu's individualism strove against that terrible tribal sense, was shattered by it.

"It's all of us!" Dwight boomed. "It's Di."

"Di?" He had Lulu's eyes now.

"Why, it's chiefly on Di's account that I'm talking," said Dwight.

"How would it hurt Di?"

"To have a thing like that in the family? Well, can't you see how it hurt her?"

"Would it, Ina? Would it hurt Di?"

"Why it would shame her—embarrass her—make people wonder what kind of stock she came from—oh," Ina sobbed, "my pure little girl!"

"Hurt her prospects, of course," said Dwight. "Anybody could see that."

"I s'pose it would," said Lulu.

SHE clasped her arms tightly, awkwardly, and stepped about the floor, her broken shoes showing beneath her cotton skirt.

"When a family once gets talked about for any reason"—— said Ina, and shuddered.

"I'm talked about now!"

"But nothing that you could help. If he got tired of you, you couldn't help that." This misstep was Dwight's.

"No," Lulu said, "I couldn't help that. And I couldn't help his other wife, either."

"Bigamy," said Dwight, "that's a crime."

"I've done no crime," said Lulu.

"Bigamy," said Dwight, "disgraces everybody it touches."

"Even Di," Lulu said.

"Lulu," said Dwight, "on Di's account will you promise us to let this thing rest with us three?"

"I s'pose so," said Lulu quietly.

"You will?"

"I s'pose so."

Ina sobbed: "Thank you, thank you, Lulu. This makes up for everything."

Lulu was thinking: "Di has a hard enough time as it is." Aloud, she said: "I told Mr. Cornish, but he won't tell."

"I'll see to that," Dwight graciously offered.

"Goodness!" Ina said, "so he knows. Well, that settles"—— She said no more.

"You'll be happy to think you've done this for us, Lulu," said Dwight.

"I s'pose so," said Lulu.

Ina, pink from her little gust of sobbing, went to her, kissed her, her trim tan tailor suit against Lulu's blue cotton.

"My sweet, self-sacrificing sister," she murmured.

"Oh, stop that!" Lulu said.

Dwight took her hand, lying limply in his. "I can now," he said, "overlook the matter of the letter."

Lulu drew back. She put her hair behind her ears, swallowed, and cried out:

"Don't you go around pitying me! I'll have you know I'm glad the whole thing happened."

Cornish had ordered six new copies of a popular song. He knew that it was popular because it was called so in a Chicago paper. When the six copies arrived, with a danseuse on the covers, he read the "words," looked wistfully at the symbols which shut him out and felt well pleased.

"Got up quite attractive," he thought, and fastened the six copies in the window of his music store.

It was not yet 9 o'clock of a vivid morning. Cornish had his floor and sidewalk sprinkled, his red and blue plush piano spreads dusted. He sat at a folding table well back in the store and opened a law book.

For half an hour he read. Then he found himself looking off the page, stabbed by a reflection which always stabbed him anew. Was he really getting anywhere with his law? And where did he really hope to get? Of late when he awoke at night this question had stood by the cot, waiting.

The cot had appeared there in the back of the music store, behind a dark sateen curtain with too few rings on the wire. How little else was in there nobody knew. But those passing in the late evening saw the blur of his kerosene lamp behind that curtain and were smitten by a realistic illusion of personal loneliness.

It was behind that curtain that these unreasoning questions usually attacked him, when his giant, wavering shadow had died upon the wall and the faint smell of the extinguished lamp went with him to his bed; or when he waked before any sign of dawn. In the mornings all was cheerful and wonted—the question had not before attacked him among his red and blue plush spreads, his golden oak and ebony cases, of a sunshiny morning.

A STEP at his door set him flying. He wanted passionately to sell a piano.

"Well!" he cried when he saw his visitor.

It was Lulu, in her dark red suit and her tilted hat.

"Well!" she also said, and seemed to have no idea of saying anything else. Her excitement was so obscure that he did not discern it.

"You're out early," he said, participating in the village chorus of this bright challenge at this hour.

"Oh, no," said Lulu.

He looked out the window, pretending to be caught by something passing, leaned to see it the better.

"Oh, how'd you get along last night?" he asked, and wondered why he had not thought to say it before.

"All right, thank you," said Lulu.

"Was he—about the letter, you know?"

"Yes," she said, "but that didn't matter. You'll be sure," she added, "not to say anything about what was in the letter?"

"Why, not till you tell me I can," said Cornish, "but won't everybody know now?"

"No," Lulu said.

At this he had no more to say, and feeling his speculation in his eyes, dropped them to a piano scarf from which he began flicking invisible specks.

"I came to tell you goodby," Lulu said.

"Goodby!"

"Yes. I'm going off—for a while. My satchel's in the bakery—I had my breakfast in the bakery."

"Say!" Cornish cried warmly, "then everything wasn't all right last night?"

"As right as it can ever be with me," she told him. "Oh, yes, Dwight forgave me."

"Forgave you!"

She smiled, and trembled.

"Look here," said Cornish, "you come here and sit down and tell me about this."

He led her to the folding table, as the only social spot in that vast area of his, seated her in the one chair, and for himself brought up a piano stool. But after all she told him nothing. She merely took the comfort of his kindly indignation.

"It came out all right," she said only. "But I won't stay there any more. I can't do that."

"Then what are you going to do?"

"In Millton yesterday," she said, "I saw an advertisement in the hotel—they wanted a chambermaid."

"Oh, Miss Bett!" he cried. At that name she flushed. "Why," said Cornish, "you must have been coming from Millton yesterday when I saw you. I noticed Miss Di had her bag"—— He stopped, stared. "You brought her back!" he deduced everything.

"Oh!" said Lulu. "Oh, no—I mean"——

"I heard about the eloping again this morning," he said. "That's just what you did—you brought her back."

"You mustn't tell that! You won't? You won't?"

"No. Course not." He mulled it. "You tell me this: Do they know? I mean about your going after her?"

"No."

"You never told!"

"They don't know she went."

"That's a funny thing," he blurted out, "for you not to tell her folks—I mean, right off. Before last night."

"You don't know them. Dwight'd never let upon that—he'd joke here about it after a while."

"But it seems"——

"Ina'd talk about disgracing h[illegible] They wouldn't know what to do. There's no sense in telling them. They aren't a mother and father," Lulu said.

Cornish was not accustomed to deal with so much reality. But Lulu's reality he could grasp.

"You're a trump, anyhow," he affirmed.

"Oh, no," said Lulu modestly.

Yes, she was. He insisted upon it.

"By George," he exclaimed, "you don't find very many married women with as good sense as you've got."

At this—just as he was agonizing because he had seemed to refer to the truth that she was, after all, not married—at this Lulu laughed in some amusement, and said nothing.

"You've been a jewel in their home all right," said Cornish. "I bet they'll miss you if you do go."

"They'll miss my cooking," Lulu said without bitterness.

"They'll miss more than that, I know. I've often watched you there"——

"You have?" It was not so much pleasure as passionate gratitude which lighted her eyes.

"You made the whole place," said Cornish. "You don't mean just the cooking?"

"No, no! I mean—well, that first night when you played croquet. I felt at home when you came out."

That look of hers, rarely seen, which was no less than a look of loveliness, came now to Lulu's face. After a pause she said:

"I never had but one compliment before that wasn't for my cooking." She seemed to feel that she must confess to that one. "He told me I done my hair up nice." She added conscientiously: "That was after I took notice how the ladies in Savannah, Ga., done up theirs."

"Well, well," said Cornish only.

"Well," said Lulu, "I must be going now. I wanted to say goodby to you—and there's one or two other places." . . .

"I hate to have you go," said Cornish, and tried to add something. "I hate to have you go," was all that he could find to add.

Lulu rose. "Oh, well," was all that she could find.

They shook hands, Lulu laughing a little. Cornish followed her to the door. He had begun on "Look here, I wish"—— when Lulu said "goodby" and paused, wishing intensely

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